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ABSTRACT

The evaluation of academic programs at colleges and universities is discussed by the Chancellor of Indiana University of Kokomo. A comprehensive programmatic review and planning process should enable the college to define clearly its purposes, goals, objectives, and priorities and to outline its strategies for achieving its goals and objectives. Committees that are likely to be involved in programmatic evaluative processes include faculty councils, councils of deans, ad hoc internal and external committees, student advisory committees, and regents. A major step in programmatic evaluation is comparing top-ranked units in the same discipline at different campuses. Universities also need to understand the nature of their student bodies and compare their profiles of students with those of competitive campuses. After the review process, priorities need to be established, including changes in support services or academic programs. For each service or program that may be either unchanged, changed, phased out, or added, certain information is needed, including: how the quality of the activity is to be measured, personnel requirements and projected expenditures, and physical facility requirements and projected expenditures. Types of comparative data useful for comparing units at different campuses are identified, along with types of comparative data about student bodies. (SW)

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# EVALUATING ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

HUGH L. THOMPSON

The fundamental missions of universities have remained unchanged for more than a century. Universities provide instruction, research, and service in a wide range of areas which are constantly changing and which are delineated by custom, tradition, and regulation. Many important decisions affecting higher education are made by the Governor and the General Assembly who have the authority to enact legislation which defines the purposes of higher education and establishes certain requirements of institutional behavior to raise revenues and appropriate funds for current operations and capital improvements. Thus, public institutions must pursue missions for the greater benefit of those publics which support it. Pursuit of these missions will require responsiveness to current public needs, both state and national, as well as an intelligent anticipation of the changing needs of society.

## Objectives and Assumptions

Each university has to establish institutional objectives. These objectives serve as guideposts to signal the way through circumstances which challenge the university. They cannot be considered rigid targets. Institutional objectives must assure that the university preserve and enhance its performance of these basic missions. If the campus is to meet its aspirations in these areas of primary mission, a superior faculty must be retained. The majority of funds should be allocated to those aspects of the institution which are directly involved in the provision of instruction, research, or service.

In the ensuing years, special emphasis must be placed upon faculty salaries and maintenance of key resources, such as library collections and laboratories, which are necessary for faculty productivity. The resources which provide these missions must be preserved because expenditures in these areas produce the greatest return for the publics which support the university. Such selection is the route to academic excellence.

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Beginning a process of programmatic review involves agreement on certain assumptions which are likely to influence the flexibility of universities in the future. Campuses must continue to insist on high quality programs and increase their attempts to recruit outstanding students by emphasizing the quality and variety of the academic programs despite the efforts of participatory groups who may seek to protect the status quo rather than support new objectives and new organizational structures designed to improve campus efficiency and vitality. Increased emphasis on merged or system-wide activities may be desirable and institutions should target areas for excellence. Flexibility will be required to accommodate the special needs of non-traditional students and each campus must continue its strong commitment to assist students with financial need. External pressure may increase to improve efficiency by applying new technology rather than by filling vacant faculty positions. Closer ties and greater cooperation with industry should be sought by each campus.

University Groups to be Involved in Process

A university is a complex, highly decentralized organization. Faculty members, each having significant individual authority, rightly expect to be involved in major processes which will determine the future directions of an institution. Similarly, students and staff need to be informed of the processes which might lead to change, as well as the proposed changes which might emerge from the process. The institution's responsibility is to hear all voices, solicit opinion broadly, and arrive at informed, carefully-formulated policies which benefit the campus as a whole. The influence of individual committees will obviously depend not only on their breadth of perspective, but also on the persuasiveness of their evaluations and recommendations. The following list suggests the kinds of committees which are likely to be involved: Appropriate Faculty Council Committees; Graduate Council; Various Policy or Executive Committees of Schools; Council of Deans; Staff Council; Ad hoc internal and external committees; Distinguished Professors Committee; Student Advisory Committee; Board of Regents, etc.

Comparative Data

A major, but complex, step in any programmatic evaluative process is the comparison of campus top-ranked units with other top-ranked units in the same discipline or area. The purpose of the comparison is to determine in which categories top units of each campus are adequately supported or staffed and in which ones they are perceived to be deficient. The comparison should provide each campus unit with a good sense of why they are highly ranked and enable them to preserve and enhance the strengths which already exist.

Some of the information will be difficult to obtain. The comparative data will require detailed analysis and might include:

number of faculty members; teaching load per FTE; average and median salary by rank; distribution of faculty effort in teaching, research, and service; age of faculty; clerical support; technical support; library allocation; equipment allocation; travel allocation; general supplies and expenses allocation; student/faculty ratio; student profiles (undergraduate and graduate); number of majors; number of credit hours; student-rated quality of teaching; student fellowship allocation; graduate and teaching assistant allocations; average and median teaching assistant salaries; placement of students; external research support per faculty member; faculty honors and awards (over 5-8 year period); publication record of faculty (citation index; quality of journals and presses); journals supported by unit; research centers supported by unit; size of facilities; age of facilities; uniqueness of unit; fees per student, etc.

The review process can employ both internal and external committees for each of the academic units. The quantifiable data need to be tied to qualitative judgments. The review process should be designed to determine future allocations of human, fiscal, and physical resources. In terms of service to a given geographic area of the state or to the entire state, historical and political considerations must be employed in the examination of each program.

Student Profile

In evaluating academic programs, universities need to understand the nature of their student bodies and compare their profiles with the profile of students at the universities with which they compete. As with the other comparative data, many factors need to be taken into account in assessing this information. Nevertheless, campuses should know: number of applications (freshmen, transfer, graduate); SAT/ACT/GRE distribution of applicants; high school or college rank of applicants; resident/non-resident ratio (perhaps by unit); mean GPA over time in various units; extracurricular activities of students; distribution of students by school/department/unit; housing conditions/locations/environments; distribution by sex; ethnic origins; financial aid support and prospects; attitudes of students toward the campus; recognition and awards to students; number of high school valedictorians and salutatorians enrolled; retention figures over a period of time; etc.

The list could be substantially extended. The results of the profile should help determine policies in financial aid, admissions, university relations, high school relations, career and placement services, learning support services, and academic advising. Each university should also attempt to identify the areas in which their best matriculants major to see what correlation exists between the interests of quality students and top-ranked units.

Reviews of Non-Degree Granting Units

Each campus should initiate a review of all non-degree granting units to be certain that they are operating as effectively and efficiently as possible. These reviews can be conducted in a variety of ways. However, they should be evaluated in terms of support to the essential curricular and co-curricular activities of each campus.

Establishing Priorities

After the review process has been completed, each unit should consider:

1. What existing support services or academic programs should be left unchanged?
2. What existing support services or academic programs should be modified?
3. What existing support services or academic programs should be phased out?
4. What new support services or academic programs should be offered?

Further, changes in quality or size of the unit need to be described. In regard to any changes, the priorities of the unit have to be expressed. The following information should be requested of each support service or academic program to be left unchanged, changed, or added:

1. A description of the activity.
2. How the quality of the activity is to be measured.
3. The contribution of the activity to institutional performance.
4. Enrollment projections for the activity and the basis for those projections.
5. Personnel requirements and projected expenditures.
6. Equipment needs and projected expenditures.
7. Physical facility requirements and projected expenditures.
8. Requirements for support from other operating units including library materials, support courses, admissions, counseling, other student services, and projected expenditures.
9. Internal and external constraints in the implementation or maintenance of the program.
10. Any special features of the program---its contribution to institutional and departmental goals, objectives, etc.

For each support service or academic program to be phased out, the following information should be requested:

1. A description of the activity.
2. How the quality of the activity is measured.
3. The contribution of the activity to institutional performance.

4. Why the activity is to be phased out.
5. The fiscal resources which will become available for other projects.

Each campus should be asked to rank their requests. The requests could be assigned to a high, medium, or low priority group. High priority requests could be implemented during the first two years of a six-year plan; medium priority items could be scheduled for implementation during the next two years. Low priority activities would not be considered until the last two years and all other requests would be scheduled for consideration in the last four years of a ten year plan.

Annual Goals and Budgeting

Each year performance goals should be established for each unit. These goals should be quantifiable, have scheduled times for completion, should be ranked in priority order, and should interface with a six and ten year plan. If a new proposal is conceived, it must coincide with the planning process and priorities which have been established. Once departmental goals are established, annual goals and priorities for the campus should be established. Again, these goals should correlate with a six and ten year plan.

Plans have to be updated with regularity, thereby enabling the campus to maintain elements of flexibility, reality, and creativity. The planning documents serve as guidelines for decision-making and should be instrumental in the preparation and construction of budgets.

## SUMMARY

Through the implementation of a comprehensive programmatic review and planning process, an institution should be able to define clearly its purposes, goals, objectives, and priorities and to outline its strategies for achieving its goals and objectives. The review and planning process should enable an institution to meld academic and financial integrity, bring into focus the resources needed to accomplish its mission programmatically, and translate to all publics, with clarity, the purpose, needs, and concerns of the campus. Foremost, a good evaluative and planning process should demonstrate to everyone that one of the best investments the state can make in maintaining and improving its vitality is through an investment in its higher educational institutions.